

## **Bits and Bytes about Electronic Records**

### **F.A.Q.s to the City Records Management Program (CRMP)**



#### **Can I keep my records in electronic format?**

Whether or not you can keep your records exclusively in an electronic format will depend on the type of records you have and the functions that the records document. Retention requirements, accessibility and migration issues must be considered prior to determining to keep a record in electronic form. The CRMP is available to assist departments on these issues.

#### **What is the retention period for electronic records?**

All records created in the City of Seattle have a specific length of time that they must be retained whether they are electronic, paper, audio, video, etc. Regardless of the format, you must be aware of the legally required retention period and ensure that electronic records can be retained and accessible for their entire retention period.

#### **What do you mean by “accessible for their entire retention period”?**

Being accessible for their entire retention period means that regardless of format, you must be able to access and read the records at any time during their retention period. If you are going to store your records in electronic form, you must ensure that you are able to open them for the duration of their retention period. One of the most challenging issues surrounding accessibility arises when employees leave. If you are going to retain your records in electronic format you must ensure that they are transferred to someone in your office who will be responsible for the continuation of their retention period.

#### **What if we decide to move to a new format?**

An important factor in records accessibility is migration. If you plan to upgrade your software or database, you will need to migrate all the information to the new format, not just the information that is currently in use. If the newer version is not backwards compatible there is the potential to lose information retained in the older versions. By migrating at the time of upgrade, you can save yourself time and money by not having to find specialized software, hardware, etc. later on.

#### **Do I have to keep the information on my drive or server?**

No, you can store electronic records on CD or magnetic media. However, accessibility and migration issues apply. Best practices in the records management profession recommend migrating your information every 3 years or as the media becomes obsolete. Do not wait until the last minute to transfer your records to a new format when you see signs of wear or aging.

#### **Who can I talk to for more information or to ensure that I can keep records in electronic format rather than paper?**

The City Records Management Program is available to assist you with these determinations. Call us at 684-8154 or email [CRMP@seattle.gov](mailto:CRMP@seattle.gov) and we can set up an appointment to meet with you.